HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 107 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, September 26, 2018

Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, September 26, 2018

● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the 107th meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

We're going to be hearing from two witnesses today, after which we're going to be doing some committee business.

I want to welcome Daniel Blaikie to the committee. He's filling in for Hélène Laverdière.

Ms. Dickson, you're going to be the first witness today. Ms. Dickson is the executive director of the Arctic Athabaskan Council.

Whenever you're ready, Ms. Dickson, please begin your testimony.

Ms. Cindy Dickson (Executive Director, Arctic Athabaskan Council): Thank you. I will begin by giving a short background history of myself and the AAC. I will then provide you with a little bit of information on some of the work of the AAC and the connections to our community and the circumpolar regions.

I come from a small community in the northern regions of Yukon Territory. I was raised by my grandfather, Lazarus Charlie, in Old Crow, Yukon. Our community has been quite isolated. To this day, it is isolated. We are a fly-in only community.

When I was growing up, we were raised without any type of plumbing or running water, and the main staple of our diet was the Porcupine caribou herd. We had that for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It provided our clothing. My grandfather was born and raised out on the land, and he worked with archaeologists for many years, helping them to understand the region in Old Crow.

I began my work with the Arctic Council back in 1999. At that time, I worked for a program called the northern contaminants program in Whitehorse. We would be provided the opportunity to attend some meetings of the Arctic monitoring assessment program, which is a working group of the Arctic Council. Basically, that's how we got started with the Arctic Council work here in Canada.

Over the years, we have really tried to connect our communities to the work of the Arctic Council through the working groups. It's been quite a long learning process for us. Our communities are very small and they have to deal with many issues.

One of the highlights of doing this type of work is being able to connect our communities with other circumpolar communities that have similar issues and stories. They have projects they share with us, and the results. Sometimes we try to emulate and connect with these different projects in various regions.

One of the first permanent participants of the Arctic Council to which we did connect was RAIPON. RAIPON is situated in Moscow. There are over 30 indigenous peoples that are part of RAIPON.

When we first made a connection, we were invited to one of their congresses. We brought some of our leaders to Moscow. For many of them, it was the first time they had travelled outside of their region. It really opened our eyes to the importance of making these connections and trying to do work in light of all the changes that are taking place in our region, like climate change.

There's a lot of in-migration of people from different parts of Canada and the world. We see new species coming into our regions, and everything seems to be going a lot faster, yet we are not quite keeping up with some of the changes.

The Chair: I just want to make sure you can still hear us.

Ms. Cindy Dickson: Yes, I can still hear you.

The Chair: Okay, please keep going.

Ms. Cindy Dickson: Early on in our work we did have the opportunity to have some exchanges back and forth with RAIPON and with members of the Arctic Athabaskan Council. One of the highlights was working on an exchange between hunters and herders. Part of the reason we did this is that we were doing some work on IPY, the International Polar Year, and in our region one of the biggest issues is caribou. Our people wanted to know a little bit more about herding and the pros and cons of herding.

We shared some of the information back and forth between our people and got a broader and better understanding of why things are the way they are. I think at some point in the future that might be a possibility for us as the caribou numbers begin to go down because of climate change and because their migration routes might be changing, so we looked for solutions within our circumpolar neighbourhood.

In our region our people have always had lower levels of education, and our elders have always taught us that education is very important and that we need to continue moving forward. We have a lot more graduates, but at the same time it's still a struggle. I think, looking at different examples around the circumpolar region, that in Russia and in the Scandinavian countries we see higher levels of indigenous peoples with high levels of education.

We are members of the University of the Arctic. We try to make those connections between our educators, and that has been very helpful with regard to continuing outreach within the circumpolar world on Arctic Council issues.

We have brought people into our region to talk about the Convention on the Law of the Sea. Although our people are not right on the coast, we see future possibilities for becoming more involved with some of the studies to provide information to our people about what is going on in that region. Sometimes it's quite unbelievable to smaller communities to know that there are discussions and decisions being made in the region. To us it seems that there are very limited opportunities, but we know that with the changing climate, all of this is changing, so we reach out to some of our neighbours within our own area to discuss these issues.

One of our members in northern Canada did say that in comparison to some regions, the populations in our region are quite small. How would we deal with disaster situations if something were to happen on our coast within reach of these smaller communities? How are we prepared?

We participated in some preparation exercises with search and rescue mock-ups. We brought communities together, our indigenous communities, to see what some of the issues might be.

● (1535)

Connecting all of this is the fact that other countries might be interested in the Arctic. We hear a bit about climate refugees. We hear about illegal substances that might be moving through Arctic waters and coming inland, and our people are not equipped to deal with such large issues. I've had the opportunity to attend a couple of meetings in Halifax. One was an Arctic security forum. They mentioned that in the north we have our Rangers, but our Rangers are not equipped to deal with such issues.

What we have noticed is that there has been some discussion about the Chinese "silk road". We see an influx of companies moving into Canada or partnering with Canada or others around the circumpolar world. China is expanding, and our people still have concerns about some of the human rights issues they see on the news, yet we do have a large, growing Chinese community here in the Yukon.

We welcome them. We learn. Their cultures are quite similar to ours if you go back to their ancient history. Our people have never been one to leave others out.

However, at the same time we notice there's a huge influx of people into our regions. Maybe one of the future discussions we would need to have is around migration, in order to understand it better, to have more of an understanding of how many people are moving into the northern regions as opposed to southern Canada.

The reason, in part, is that our community members don't always see or don't look at personal property. When we're in a community, we have our land claims here in Canada, so everything is owned by everyone, including the land. When you come to more southern, urban areas, such as Whitehorse, all of a sudden you need to buy land. A lot of property is being bought by people from even outside of Canada. A lot of other people are moving in from other countries.

Just for the future, knowing that there's an increase globally in population, we need to look at these areas.

Working within the Arctic Council, I see the need for more information coming north. There's a need for some of these issues to be brought forward to our people. We need more information, better education, more research directed to international or circumpolar communities, and we need to have community-based opportunities to participate.

● (1540)

Education, I think, is going to be quite important, as well as dissemination of information to our communities. Right now we have limited possibility at the Arctic Council level. The Arctic Council does put out newsletters and it has a website, but there's still nothing better than having meetings or workshops in the north at our community levels to talk about some of these issues, to bring forth any future issues that experts are saying may come to pass.

One of the key areas for our people is the caribou herds. We see a lot of the numbers going down. The Porcupine caribou herd is still quite stable at the highest level it has ever been at, but the migration patterns are changing, which leads to food security issues in our communities. We do hear the same from some of the herders we have contact with—

● (1545)

The Chair: Ms. Dickson, I'm wondering if you could maybe take another minute or so just to conclude. I want to make sure we leave plenty of time for members to ask you questions, because I know they're going to have many. If you could maybe just wrap up testimony, we'll get into the question phase.

Ms. Cindy Dickson: All right.

Just to wrap up, I think education is quite important, as well as research, more circumpolar opportunities for our communities, and food security. Also, I would just really stress the importance of coming into our communities to have these discussions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're going to be heading up north next week as a committee, and hearing from you was a great introduction.

Let's go straight into questions. We're going to begin with MP O'Toole, please.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Thank you very much for participating in this meeting. We appreciate your making the time. I'm sorry about some of the technical difficulties you have to work under.

I found a lot of your discussion quite interesting, particularly your discussion of the Arctic Council and the work with indigenous communities in Russia and Scandinavia. You mentioned people from your organization travelling to Moscow to go to its convention. I'm wondering if, from the viewpoint of remote communities in our north and from those interactions through the council, we have been able to take back ideas, learnings, and economic development opportunities that we've seen be successful in other polar regions in those countries.

Ms. Cindy Dickson: I think there's been quite a lot of discussion about economic opportunities with our Russian counterparts, as well as those within Scandinavia. There were some good exchanges between our communities, and great ideas. We were able to look at minerals and at forestry, and we were able to discuss micro-businesses between our communities, the possibility that at some point we'd be able to get some of our homemade crafts to these other markets in Russia or in Scandinavia, and vice versa. There was a lot of sharing of artistic abilities. We looked at some of the really great industries in Scandinavia around home-based products.

I think there was a lot of really good exchange of information, but the next step is how to do that. We're not quite sure. That is the next area that we really need to focus on, because micro-businesses are much different from large-scale businesses.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: You also mentioned that some of the Scandinavian indigenous communities have, I think you said, a better track record with respect to education and a number of things like that.

Is there any specific reason? Is there more of a role for government in terms of support for young people in isolated communities? What can we learn from their success in that area?

● (1550)

Ms. Cindy Dickson: Well, it is my understanding that in Scandinavia and in Russia, their higher education institutes are free. People are able to go to universities, and in Scandinavia—[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Chair: Sorry about that, Ms. Dickson. We'll just....

I think we're okay again. We apologize for that.

Ms. Cindy Dickson: It's still beeping here.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: I mention Russia, and things get crossed up.

The Chair: We're back on. You have my apologies.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: I have a few minutes left.

You had mentioned some of the differences: better access, free tuition, these sorts of things. My final question is on the education piece.

I particularly appreciated your talking about your personal background in a remote fly-in community and being raised by your grandfather.

For education, whether it's through the University of the Arctic or elsewhere, for those who access it, is there a problem with people going south for education and then not returning north? Is that something you see as a phenomenon, and then that in itself is perhaps a barrier to education because of families not wanting to lose children and family to the south? Is that a real dynamic? I've heard that before, and I'm wondering if there are things we can do to reduce that.

Ms. Cindy Dickson: I think it's a bit of both. Some students leave for the south; they want other opportunities. What I have also seen is people moving back north once they've had the experience of living and working elsewhere.

I think in the smaller communities, part of the issue is that in the lower-level grades, we have many students and we have one teacher. Sometimes they teach one, two, or three grades. Then you have to leave your community to go to high school in Whitehorse, and sometimes there are culture shock issues. There hasn't been a lot of support in the past.

On the education level, our institutions are lagging behind a bit. These are some of the challenges.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: No. Thank you very much.

We are now going to move straight to MP Saini.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Good afternoon, Ms. Dickson. It's a pleasure to have you on this committee.

I'm going to focus my questions on two areas: One is on health, and one is on the northern contaminants program, for which I know you were instrumental in writing the traditional knowledge guideline.

Given that the melting ice right now is leading to the opening of new maritime routes, obviously there's going to be a risk of contamination. What do you feel would be the ultimate impact of that, not only on contamination and the environment but also on your traditional food sources?

Ms. Cindy Dickson: That's a good question.

With regard to health, I think one of the larger impacts in regard to the changing climate is not going to be contaminants per se; it's going to be the increase in precipitation. It's going to affect people who already have issues with their lungs and also small babies or elders. We are not used to a lot of precipitation in our area. Our air is very dry. I think that's a huge factor that we are starting to see.

With regard to the northern contaminants program, I think that program is still going on. It's quite a stellar program that connects the local people to international sources. In that program, they also provide the opportunities for our people to discuss any issues that might be moving forward. They have a very good education component whereby they disseminate the information so the communities can make informed choices. I think that's a good way to go. We work with federal health officials, researchers, and people at the community level, and together they make those decisions on where to focus.

● (1555)

Mr. Raj Saini: That leads into my second question. One thing I didn't realize is that the Arctic has a very efficient system of bioaccumulation and biomagnification of contaminants, which is something of a new phenomenon right now, as opposed to the past. Obviously that is having an impact on health.

I ask this for selfish reasons, because I'm a health care professional and I want to know more. You mentioned the dry climate, lungs, and precipitation. You have this system and you're saying that there's more precipitation, and obviously that will lead to more bioaccumulation. I know that you do a lot of work in testing fish in Little Fox Lake, I think, which I believe is in Yukon, where you're checking the bioaccumulation of contaminants. My question is, what impacts have you been seeing over the last several years that are different from what was present before?

Ms. Cindy Dickson: I can comment briefly.

Some of the impacts that are coming forward are increasing levels of certain contaminants in different areas. Right now, the concern is mercury, but we are still saying that there are more health benefits to eating our fish than not eating them. They're giving some recommendations for pregnant women and for younger children to not eat as much or to refrain from it.

We see more research and workshops giving out the information in our communities through that program. There is a study in Old Crow right now. They're going to be looking at different types of contamination, and they will be taking hair samples, which we've never done in the past, in looking more at mercury.

Mr. Raj Saini: I have a last question. You're working within our Arctic Council, and you have the opportunity through the Arctic Council to collaborate with other people who live in the Arctic. Are you finding that there are other populations, not necessarily in Canada but maybe in Russia or in other areas, that are similarly facing somewhat of a rising health risk or a health risk that is different from what they were used to before?

Before, there was no contamination to some extent, and different contaminants now are being introduced into that area. Are you finding that it's similar in the Arctic amongst other countries and communities, or is it specific to one area?

Ms. Cindy Dickson: No, it's similar in other regions. There are different health concerns, but AMAP, the Arctic monitoring and assessment program of the Arctic Council, really deals very well with a lot of the emerging issues or issues that have been documented from the past. They do get together and have very good discussions. Canada is really one of the only countries I know of that connects the northern contaminants program to AMAP very well. We give the results to AMAP and then share that broadly.

● (1600)

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move now to MP Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you for your work and thank you for your time here today.

My question probably has a few different components to it, but it centres largely around the opening up of the north for commercial activity as climate change progresses. Oftentimes in Canada's history, when the rights of indigenous people have been ignored or indigenous people have been displaced, there's usually been an economic imperative, not always but often because somebody wants to develop this or develop that.

I'm curious to know, first of all, what you see as some of the risks to increased commercial development in the north, and I'm curious also to know what you think some of the potential benefits for your communities are.

Finally, what kind of framework do you think we could be putting in place now to ensure that we can maximize the benefits to your communities and to Canada while ensuring that we don't repeat mistakes of the past, where indigenous people have been pushed out once there's been economic interest from others?

Ms. Cindy Dickson: Those are very interesting questions, because I have been involved with some of these issues myself.

Communities want to see economic development. They do want to see our communities prosper. The generations that are now starting to get into higher levels of education want to be able to see success and to have opportunities as other Canadians do. That said, there is also a sense of wanting to make sure that the lands given out for economic opportunity have as little impact as possible and that the technology that moves into our areas is deemed safe.

The way to do this is really to have good discussions with our communities and with the leaders. You need to start this framework quite early. We do have YESAB here in the territory, which looks at impacts and benefits. They are the ones who give the social licence to have economic opportunities.

At the community level, I think you must go into the regions well before anything takes place. You have to talk to people. You have to give them a big-picture view with a long outreach of 10 to 20 years on what the vision is for that area. You have to work so that the people are well informed and have opportunity. You have to bring forward very early the pros and cons of some of these economic opportunities.

This is particularly true with oil and gas development. In our region we have a lot of mining. We've had it for over 100 years, and people are quite familiar with it. Oil and gas is something different. We haven't had that here in the north. There could be a lot of education moving forward. People talk about the Law of the Sea. What are the different routes if there's going to be an extractive industry in that area? Start gearing education components to our people so that they could become the petroleum engineers, etc., and not always the menial caste labour.

● (1605)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: How important do you think it is for Canadian sovereignty in the north that any investments in projects be made by either the Government of Canada or by Canadian companies, as opposed to foreign companies? Do you see that as playing out differently, depending on where the money comes from, for your communities? What do you think might be the importance of that for Canadian sovereignty?

Ms. Cindy Dickson: I think Canadian sovereignty is really important to our communities. I think our communities would be more supportive of Canadian companies. Our communities take quite a bit of pride in helping to establish and maintain sovereignty just by virtue of the areas they live in.

I'll give you an example. Sinopec, a Chinese company, invested in a local company in Yukon that was doing exploration, and the communities did not accept that. They now have more acceptance of the company because the company was bought out. Sinopec is no longer in the picture, and the communities are now listening.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move to MP Sidhu, please.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your testimony here today, Ms. Dickson. It's very important, because we're coming to the region next week.

You touched on a lot of important issues with the changes with Russia and China. I'm pretty sure you know the changes coming into the area. I was wondering how important traditional knowledge of indigenous people is when we're going forward with the policy. How are you going to participate in the dialogue when we're trying to shape the policy for development in that area?

Ms. Cindy Dickson: Thank you.

Traditional knowledge is at the heart of everything we do. It is very key to our work and understanding who we are as a people. We still practise a lot of land-based activities. We still go hunting.

I just came back from hunting this past weekend. We try to make sure that we only take what we need for our family and our friends and elders. We still practise being respectful to our elders. We always ensure that if there is an elder in the room who's older than us, they are provided with the utmost respect, because their knowledge and experience are their higher education, and it goes back much longer than ours.

Our communities are really grounded in the fact that they live in the area where their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents have lived. We think of traditional knowledge as ongoing. The only reason we say "traditional" is that it comes from way back, but it's still moving forward and it's still very much alive. Our people have always been able to adapt different elements into our everyday living.

Boiling it down, it's respect for the land because the land feeds us; respect for the animals that give their lives so we can live, and trying to treat everybody with respect.

My grandfather always said that when he travels, he has friends in all the communities. What he is saying is that all this respect for one another is the key to traditional knowledge.

● (1610)

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Thank you so much.

You've touched on two countries, Russia and China. Correct me if I'm wrong, but do you think that China would be the first one to explore that area? Do you feel comfortable with them coming into the area and exploring it? At the same time, China has been investing heavily in that region, so there's going to be some hope for China. I'd be very careful, but China doesn't have very high environmental practices when they explore. How do you see both countries playing a role in the Arctic?

Ms. Cindy Dickson: People I've had discussions with at the community level are a little bit concerned about Chinese companies coming into our areas because of their environmental practices and human rights practices. They are not comfortable, but at the same time, it is happening. China is moving into certain areas

I think knowledge is key. It's better to be prepared and to be knowledgeable about what's going on. If they want to come into certain areas and do business, maybe this is where we could have some influence or our Canadian government could have some influence on some of the practices that we don't consider right. Maybe this is a role through which our government can influence some of those practices.

In regard to Russia, we absolutely respect the people. We respect the high levels of education that the indigenous people have in Russia. At the same time, we also see a lot of the hardships that people have there. We're very careful when we send our own people over. We hope that there can be better connections between Siberia, Alaska and Canada to establish those kinds of routes—rather than going all the way around.

Thank you.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Ms. Dickson, that brings us to the end of our time, but I want to thank you for coming and giving us such a wide-ranging testimony. This is tremendously important and beneficial, as we are heading up north early next week. On behalf of everybody on the committee, thank you very much for taking the time to join us today.

Ms. Cindy Dickson: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend now.

● (1610)

(Pause)

● (1615)

The Chair: I'm calling this meeting back to order.

We are fortunate to have our second panel of witnesses here. From Quebec, we have the Honourable Charlie Watt, president of Makivik Corporation and former senator. He retired this past January after 34 years. Joining him is Robin Campbell, associate at Hutchins Legal Inc.

Mr. Watt, would you like to begin your testimony? I understand we might be hearing a short bit from Ms. Campbell as well. Please proceed.

Hon. Charlie Watt (President, Makivik Corporation): Thank you, honourable members of the House of Commons.

It's been a while now that I haven't been around, but I have learned to enjoy being part of the overall system. At the same time, I have specific issues that I would like to address, matters that may be of concern to you and that are certainly of concern to the Inuit in the Arctic. That's probably one of the reasons I was inside the system and decided to get out of the system and do what I can from the outside to continuously raise the importance of issues that all of us face today, especially with the climate change that is taking place. The country is not the same as it used to be.

As you know, very recently, I think only about a week ago, we got hit with something that I have never witnessed in Canada before—the tornado that passed through Ottawa. It went through Gatineau and also Laval, which I witnessed when I went to Montreal.

That said, for many years I've been here in Ottawa. I remember the first time I came here was, I think, two weeks after I addressed the issue that is coming, which the Inuit already were living with—that is, climate change. We see every day that a big change has taken place. The Inuit in the north live with that on a daily basis. I thought I would just cover that as a preamble to what I have to say.

Good afternoon, honourable members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I'm not sure whether I recognize some people here. I was going to say that I'm glad to see the familiar faces, but I see a very limited number of familiar faces here. Anyway, time goes by and changes take place. The new people come and go.

Honourable members, my name is Charlie Watt, as you know. Until the spring, as the chair mentioned, I was a sitting senator for the region of Inkerman, Quebec. I was on the job for 34 years, as the chair mentioned. I was Canada's only Inuit senator. I was not the only Inuit senator when I first came here. Senator Willie Adams was already here when I arrived in the Senate chamber. I did work with him on a number of different fronts. When he left, when his time to go came, then it was a bit of a lonely place for me as an Inuk speaking fluently in my own language. Willie was also fluent in this language. Willie was a great contributor towards what I have learned within the system.

As Canada's only Inuit senator, I focused on issues important to the Inuit. Arctic sovereignty is a subject that is very important to me and my people. The Senate financed several studies on this issue while I was here. As a matter of fact, the study that we undertook took us, I would say, maybe six to seven years. We concentrated on where the Inuit sit on this whole issue of sovereignty. We looked into domestic rights, which had been built for some years, and also looked at international rights. We came up with three sets of reports that we tabled to the government. I believe you have a copy of those.

● (1620)

The first one was done in the year 2012, and the title of it is "Inuit: Canada's Treaty Partners or Free Agents?" You might be wondering why we added on the free agents. That indicates where we belong, who we are, who owns the Arctic, who lives in the Arctic, who relies on the Arctic, for social, economic, educational and cultural purposes. As you know, we have lived in the Arctic for many years, long before any other society came to Canada, and I think that is very well known.

When you're facing a subject like Arctic sovereignty, knowing that there is a great deal of interest from outside Canada in the international communities makes you nervous. It makes you nervous that there's going to be an influx of people who have money, political clout, moving in. At times when I see the requests that are made by various countries wanting to become observers, to get observer status within the Arctic Council, I say to myself, "Well, it's observer status now, but it will be more than observer status later on down the road."

When people come in from different parts of the world and they have money, they will definitely have an influence over what happens to Canada. This worries me a great deal. On that account, I'm here to try to emphasize how important it is for the Inuit people to engage in this process. I see the rationale behind government's intention in terms of the way that they're engineering this and structuring it out to allow seven Arctic countries to be able to highlight what their concerns are, but at the same time they are also dealing with the continental shelfs and so on, by way of trying to extend their jurisdiction beyond their jurisdiction. I'm talking about the seven Arctic countries.

At the same time those people probably will be given an absolute power and the rights to do whatever they want to do if they do manage to succeed in establishing the boundary on the continental shelf. What does that mean to us? It means that the countries from the outside world that have an interest in extracting resources will have an access. They're going to have a large role to play within our society, definitely within the Inuit society, because they're going to be extracting certain things under our feet.

I also would like to mention that the Inuit in the north live not only on the land. This is probably hard to understand. How can any human being live on the ice? As you know, in wintertime when the Inuit are travelling, they travel by ice, by water, and by land.

I was able to get myself a very credible individual from Dalhousie University a few years ago, and we did the mapping of the Inuit trail from the northern Quebec side, which is called Nunavik, on up to Nunavut, on up to the Northwest Passage to Greenland, and also towards Alaska and Siberia. The part that's already completed is on the Canadian side, but we still have to push for countries like Greenland to work something out with the Danish government to be able to do the same thing—map out exactly how they live and how they travel, what they relied on. That information is very important, especially when you're going to be having people coming in from outside Canada, wanting to know. They're probably not even going to care too much about wanting to know. They'll be wanting to extract, take something, and take it home, and turn it into a dollar.

Honourable members, I have a tendency at times to go on and on, and I like to try to limit myself as much as possible, because I only have so much time.

● (1625)

What I wanted to say to you is to stretch it to the point is where hopefully everybody will understand. The Inuit are the backbones of Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic. Another fact, to tell you the truth, is some of my people from the Quebec side, from the Nunavik side, have been moved—the whole family, that is—by boat, by ship, to the Resolute Bay area, into the high Arctic with no facilities, no assistance. They were just literally dropped on the shore under the name of sovereignty.

Those were placed there by the Canadian government, and at that time, during the years of the 1950s, government mobility in the north were limited. They were basically represented by the RCMP at the time. The directions were given by the government, but the RCMP would have to take action to enforce certain things that were given to the RCMP by the government.

As you can see, we have reasons that we want to be a part of it, and not only to be a part in terms of knowing what's happening but also to have a full right to take part. If there is going to be something economically, which there will be, it should not only be going outside of our country. We'd like to tap into those resources, because we need to live, the same as everybody else. We have to survive, so the economy is very important to us.

Right now we have a traditional economy. There is not too much of an economy, other than the traditional economy. The traditional economy is to seek out and do your harvesting in the same sort of similar way that you harvest as a farmer. We don't have farms, but we do go out, whether it's on the boat, whether it's in the canoe, or whether it's on the plane or snow machine or whatever. In the old days it used to be the dog teams. That was the only transportation we had in the old days. That no longer exists. For your information, those dogs were also slaughtered in the early years by the RCMP.

What was the rationale behind the actions that were taken by them? Nobody really wanted to come out publicly and describe exactly why that happened. This isn't really related to Arctic sovereignty, but it's one of the issues that make me tend to believe that we have to be involved in the whole thing.

The Inuit have been present in the Arctic for thousands of years and were sovereign people long before Canada's existence, as I mentioned to you. Since time immemorial we have lived on the land and ice-covered water in the Arctic and used the resources of the land and water to grow as a people. We are deeply connected to not just the land, but also the Arctic Ocean and all the Arctic wildlife. The Inuit are the people who occupied marine areas. The Inuit live on the ice and hunt and travel across it.

Also, we have a different land claims agreement in each of our four land claims regions. The Inuit of Canada are taxpayers. Sometimes people have forgotten that the Inuit too pay taxes. We're not the same as first nations. We have been full-fledged taxpayers from day one up to now.

We always feel as Inuit that we have to also help to put an input into the bigger society with the people who live in the south. Hopefully, the fact that we decided to become taxpayers in the early years will be appreciated by Canada. For that reason, we are contributors to the needs of Canada. On top of that I'd just like to mention to you that before...after I was...no, not really.

● (1630)

Take a look at the Nunavik corporation that I represent, Makivik. We've done well as Inuit, but then again, we still need to do more. We've been able to succeed and have done quite well in the aviation sector. We own the two big airline companies. One is called Air Inuit and the other one is First Air. This coming Friday, we are about to merge another airline company into us, which is Canadian North. Those are the types of arrangements taking place, and we are quite capable of administering and running companies and producing economic opportunities on our own, which are very limited today.

When you look at the payload of goods that flow from the south to the north, it's a one-way flow in terms of economic viability. What's coming out of the north is very limited. For that reason, we are now going through the exercise on the aviation side of amalgamating the two airline companies. There is not enough room for two. This is one of the things we're doing, just to show you what we deal with. We know what we deal with.

When you look at the needs of the many companies that are trying to make ends meet, at times everyone doesn't benefit because there are limited economic opportunities. Let me go a step further.

Am I going a little too slow or spending too much time?

● (1635)

Ms. Robin Campbell (Associate, Hutchins Legal Inc.): You have a few more minutes.

Hon. Charlie Watt: Okay.

I would like to mention also that we do have access to an instrument, aside from Makivik Corporation, which is a national organization called ITK. It is also engaged with the Government of Canada on a Crown-relationship basis.

We also have another organization called ICC, the Inuit Circumpolar Council. I was at that meeting just a few months ago in Point Barrow, Alaska. We talked about a number of different issues that are related and are of concern to the Inuit.

We passed a huge number of declarations that we consider to be important and that need to be known by the outside world in order for us to survive. Climate change is a big factor. The food chain is being affected. The security of our food is being affected. We have to become a very heavily innovative people.

At times, we look around to see where we can get help. Maybe the only way that we can get help is if we make it explicitly clear that without money there's very little we can do, even in the north. We need money. Without money, there's very little you can do, as I mentioned.

There was another instrument that I helped build in the very early years, which is the Arctic Council. It allows seven Arctic countries to rotate on the chairmanship of that organization. Where are the Inuit? They have permanent participation. What does that participation mean? It's a token participation. They don't have a very clear voice in terms of being able to use it to get their points across. They're not decision-makers. Even when it comes down to their life, they don't make decisions. Who makes the decisions? It's the seven Arctic countries. We have no role. The only role that we have is tokenism.

That has to change. If we're going to get somewhere and close the gap between understanding what we're dealing with, that instrument has to change. We have to be able to learn to accept the permanent residents of the Arctic. It's their homeland; they have to be part of it. I was even wondering why they aren't calling on them to bring them in as a chair of the Arctic Council.

This is an issue I've been dealing with over the last 15 years. They're trying to make the point. I'm trying to get these different countries, ambassadors and so on, to understand. They do understand it, but they think, if we allow you to have access, what about the others?

Here we are dealing with the question of the Arctic. It's a very sensitive Arctic, as you know. It's a very special area. It's a last frontier. Inuit have lived there for thousands of years, before anybody else, so they must have some understanding of what the Arctic is all about. The rest of the world can learn from that. Now, they leave us on the side and never bother to give us an answer as to where we stand in regard to this whole development.

The Chair: Thank you, Senator.

Ms. Campbell, did you want to take a short couple of minutes?

Ms. Robin Campbell: Absolutely. I'm just—

Hon. Charlie Watt: I'll make sure that she covers the legal part of it.

The Chair: Okay, but keep it to a maximum of three minutes, please.

Ms. Robin Campbell: Absolutely.

I'm going to come behind Senator Watt really quickly to re-emphasize the point that Canada's sovereignty does depend on Inuit. Inuit had effective occupation of the Arctic long before there was ever a Canada, or any of the Arctic states, and Canada needs this relationship with Inuit to be able to ground its sovereignty in land and ultimately in water.

That's done through the treaties. It is incredibly important to respect the treaties and the fact that the treaties create partnerships with Inuit. That partnership is a developing partnership. The treaties are not something that happened and are over; they create a whole range of management and ways to govern the Canadian north, and they require an updating.

One of the things that Senator Watt, now president of the Makivik Corporation, is looking at is updating the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement to make sure that Inuit can properly govern and are able to go back to the way they used to govern in the north. This is a priority, and it's a priority across the north.

In addition, you're looking at the continental shelf and extending Canada's sovereignty to the north. Recognizing that there is this partnership and that the partnership has benefited Canada by allowing it to have this sovereignty into the Arctic Ocean, that sovereignty depends on our sovereignty over the land, and that sovereignty over the land depends on Inuit. That partnership needs to be able to extend into the waters of the Arctic and to extend to ocean governance internationally.

I want to emphasize that this has been a frustration for Inuit, because the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS, does not recognize indigenous peoples' rights. That is a major concern. As Canada starts to look at its sovereignty in the Arctic over the extended continental shelf—and it will be making its submission to the UNCLOS commission that looks at those things in early 2019—it hasn't, to Makivik's view, properly consulted with Inuit or recognized Inuit rights or that Inuit are in a partnership. Makivik is looking for that type of partnership with Canada, and looking for even that recognition in the submission that's going to be made in 2019.

Further, that partnership should involve working with Inuit to look at protections for those deep seabed areas, for the oceans that will be affected, and also looking to partner to ensure that if there are benefits coming from the exploration and exploitation of those areas that Inuit benefit from that as well.

I do want to quickly point out—

● (1640)

The Chair: It's going to have to be in 30 seconds or less, if that's okay. I want to leave time for all members to get their questions in.

Ms. Robin Campbell: There are two quick recommendations that we have, then.

There is a new agreement coming up that is being negotiated. It has just started to be negotiated at the UN. It will affect all the high seas in the world, and it will, of course, affect the Arctic Ocean. Canada is involved in this—it's at the UN this September—and we're looking for Inuit rights in the Arctic to be recognized in this agreement, which would have a major impact on the UNCLOS system. It would perhaps amend some of the wrongs of the UNCLOS system for not having recognized those rights previously by including them now.

The Chair: Thank you very much to you both.

We'll move right into questions, with MP Alleslev, please.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you very much.

My goodness, that was incredibly comprehensive. There are so many things.

I want to be able to put it in perspective, to make sure that I have the big picture. The big picture is that what was in the Arctic is not what it is today because of some significant changes, not the least of which is climate change, and also because of a whole bunch of people interested in some really cool natural resources, such as minerals and other things. They are now more of an economic driver, so we have to keep our focus going that way.

The second thing that I heard you say is that we need to focus on our international policies and figure out what they are going to look like. How are we going to regulate people who want to come and do stuff? How are we going to distribute that economic...?

The third thing is that we have a bunch of relationships that we have to change with the Inuit to support whatever that foreign policy is. I think I also heard you say that we have to do that at the same time, because what we're negotiating externally has to be almost what we're negotiating internally, to make sure we've....

Whoa. How do we do that? What are the three key framework themes that we have to focus on to be able to unpack this really complicated but incredibly important topic?

● (1645)

Hon. Charlie Watt: How do we do it? Well, we've been wrestling with that for quite some time. I was sort of hoping at the beginning that we were going to get a response from the government right away, but that did not happen.

Knowing the facts, there is a lot of work that needs to be done, a lot of adjustment, a lot of amendments, a lot of revisiting of certain things, and so on.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Just help me out with the first thing, the top three. We're going to make a recommendation. What do we have to do first?

Hon. Charlie Watt: I think what we need to do is take those recommendations. At the same time, recommendations alone are not good enough unless we have the machinery in place. What is missing is the machinery. What I call a missing link in the whole process is to establish a place, a mechanism, whereby we can have discussion and dialogue on certain issues. Maybe at times we might want to turn it into a negotiation later on, after the discussion. That's what's missing.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Perfect.

I'd like to turn it over to my colleague.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you both. I only have a couple of minutes left.

I believe firmly that the duty to consult means both prior to development and, once a development is under way, substantially changing that or changing rights over a certain jurisdiction.

In 2016, the Prime Minister, in conjunction with President Obama, put a ban on Arctic development for 17% of the Arctic land mass and 10% of the waters. The Premier of the Northwest Territories was disappointed because there was no consultation whatsoever.

To your knowledge, Senator, was there any consultation with Inuit communities? I believe you're right: they are the backbone of our sovereignty.

Hon. Charlie Watt: There have never been clear consultations. As a matter of fact, when the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada made that decision, we were not too happy. Without even coming to us, they just turned around and said, "This is what's going to happen."

Hon. Erin O'Toole: You were surprised by it.

Hon. Charlie Watt: Yes.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: It was out of the blue.

Hon. Charlie Watt: A lot of Inuit people didn't know. They were very surprised.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Ms. Campbell, would that breach the duty of consultation required, in your view as an aboriginal lawyer?

Ms. Robin Campbell: The simple answer is yes.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you. I rest my case.

The Chair: Okay.

We're now going to move to MP Vandenbeld, please.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Actually, Ms. Campbell, when you were winding up your remarks, it sounded as though you had another recommendation that you wanted to add. Did you want to take the first moments and finish your remarks?

Ms. Robin Campbell: I would just point out that ICC Canada is not here, and we hope that you will meet with ICC. We wanted to take the opportunity as well to point out that it has a huge mandate. It has the voice of Inuit internationally on so many different issues, at so many different fora. It was instrumental in creating the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and it sat on the Canadian delegation for the recent central Arctic fisheries agreement. Actually, it is a landmark in itself that ICC was on the Canadian delegation, and we see that as something that is a best practice, for sure, and something that should be expanded. It is also underfunded, so we want to point out that it really deserves much more funding to play the valuable role that it does.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Senator Watt, you referenced quite a bit of history, some of that history obviously being very painful. You referenced—

● (1650)

Hon. Charlie Watt: I'm having a hard time. I didn't put my earpiece on, so....

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Okay, I'll talk a little bit louder for you.

You talked about history and some of the painful history, like the forced removals and the slaughtering of the dogs. You also talked about rights, both domestic and international. With the Inuit being the backbone of our sovereignty in the north, to what extent are reconciliation and sovereignty intertwined? To what extent are those two interdependent, and what would that kind of reconciliation in the north look like?

Hon. Charlie Watt: When you look at the question of rights, I think the rights are there, but how are you dealing with that in terms of using the recognition that you require to be able to consult with the people that have the rights? This is not what's happening.

How do they intertwine? Well, that's something that's down the road, and hopefully we'll be able to deal with that. This is what I mean when I say we end up setting up a table for discussion purposes and if we need to identify areas that we need to sit down and negotiate, this is where they're going to have to be rectified. Whether that is going to....

One of the interesting things is that we have so many rights overlapping with each other now because of our constitutional rights, aboriginal rights, negotiated rights, United Nations declarations, and so on. Those are all of the rights that describe what we could do and how we could deal with it. I think, as I said earlier on, we need an estimate. The government has to agree to sit down with us, and we need to set up a table. The process has to move. If we don't move it, who's going to move it? Is the government going to act on its own to move this file, or is it going to use the Inuit in some way, recognizing the fact that the Inuit are the key to the whole question of Arctic sovereignty?

Don't forget that we are very close to the next-door neighbours up north in the Arctic. At times when you see restlessness between the two countries from time to time, especially with the kind of president we have on the American side, you don't know what's going to happen. We need to realign ourselves. We are Canadian. I hope we are appreciated as Canadians.

Thank you.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I would dare say you are appreciated.

I did pick up on what you said, though, about the tokenism and the fact that there should be some kind of permanent decision-making representation of Inuit people on the Arctic Council. You talked about being taxpayers and being Canadian. How would you see that? Would it be an indigenous presence, or maybe a Canadian indigenous presence?

Hon. Charlie Watt: I guess there are two possible ways you can look at that.

One is to keep the importance of the Inuit in the Arctic. Let them become a chair of the Arctic Council. That's one.

Another possibility is that since the seven Arctic countries rotate on the chairmanship, maybe they can be a co-chair to those rotating different countries that take turns from time to time. I think it's every three or four years. I think it's a three-year term. They need to have more input. They don't feel comfortable enough at this point to say, "This is the place where I can address my concerns."

Ms. Robin Campbell: If I could follow up really quickly on your question, you had asked how this would work and whether it would be like ICC Canada.

If ICC could come and address the committee, it would be so much better, but since they are not here right now, I will tell you that they are a pan-Inuit body. They sit at the Arctic Council as permanent participants already, as this pan-Inuit group, so it would be looking at giving permanent participants the ability to make decisions and have those decisions recognized.

The Chair: Just as a point of clarification for the committee members, because they may not be aware, the Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada, the ICC, was invited to participate in this panel and was confirmed until yesterday, when there was some kind of emergency and they had to cancel. They have said that they're going to send in a brief. They were actually scheduled, I think as you know, to be part of this particular panel today.

With that, we'll go to MP Blaikie, please.

● (1655)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

I want to come back to some of the discussion we've had around a framework for development or decisions going forward, some of which will be development decisions. We heard a little bit from a colleague about decisions being made without adequate consultation to not have development go forward. We've heard recently from the Federal Court in regard to some cases further south about development going forward without adequate consultation.

Can you speak to the kind of framework you think we could put in place, and to what extent having a framework that requires consultation but without any decision-making authority or without a seat at the decision-making table means in terms of the likely success of indigenous peoples and Inuit feeling adequately consulted?

What kind of framework might we put in place so that if there are development decisions going forward in the north, Inuit feel that they have been adequately consulted and that those consultations have actually made a real impact in the decisions to proceed or not to proceed, or to proceed in a way that was different from what was originally envisioned by the project proponents?

Hon. Charlie Watt: There are many needs. Let me try to describe them.

What you are asking is twofold. One is down the road, and the other one is what we do now in coming up with a framework.

Are you talking about a framework in the same fashion that the Government of Canada looks at a framework in regard to dealing with domestic matters? We are comforted with that right now. There have been several attempts to describe what that framework is going to be. As far as I'm concerned, it's still very incomplete.

When you are asking me, I guess you were asking me more at the international level. I'm not sure whether nailing down a framework is going to do it. I really feel, rather than trying to come up with a framework, that you're going to end up discussing the issues and eventually maybe the negotiations. What are we really doing talking about a framework? Who are we preparing? Are we preparing ourselves, as the Inuit people, that we would be a lot better off if we come up with a framework, and that we know what the name of the game is, and what we can touch and what we cannot touch? I don't think that's the right way of dealing with it.

What you need to do is agree to recognize that we do exist, that we have rights, and that therefore we have the rights to have the discussion with our government. We have the right to exchange with our government. Is simply writing a framework just a way of saying, "Let's just delay that. Put that on the back burner. We'll deal with later?"

I don't see how a framework is going to help us. It will probably help the government. It could even be a disadvantage for us to try to live through a framework that is going to be established, for the domestic and also for the international aspects. A framework to me is what is already imprinted in the Constitution itself. We also have a land claims agreement. That is the framework. We have a role to play with the government with regard to the ocean. That is the framework.

What's wrong with what already exists and has been established over the years? Why do we need to create another one all the time?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Granted, there are a lot of rights that are recognized in many different forums now. Hopefully soon, when my colleague, Romeo Saganash's, bill goes through the Senate, as we hope it will, it will be another re-emphasis of the importance of the United Nations declaration.

Hon. Charlie Watt: I heard he lost his cool today.

● (1700)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Yes, he did lose his cool a little yesterday, and one can understand why, in part because there are a lot of rights for indigenous peoples that are recognized in many different ways, but from the point of view of the process and when you get a concrete project moving ahead, for all the success in the abstract, when it comes to concrete projects, it doesn't seem to matter what has been negotiated or not.

When I'm talking about a framework, I take your point that we don't need another agreement, but we do need a way to actualize or to put into motion what already exists on paper. I wonder what you think that looks like in terms of what needs to change from the way things are working now. If the development model that we're seeing in many places across Canada right now when it comes to indigenous people obtains as the north opens up, we can expect similar types of conflicts and frustration by indigenous people who feel that they're not being heard.

What do we have to do differently in order to honour those commitments that we've already made in a number of different forums and make sure that the development that is very likely going to happen in the north happens in the right way and it's not something that we're apologizing for 70, 80, or 90 years after the fact?

The Chair: I'm sorry, but the time is up on that. Maybe you'll be able to squeeze a short answer to MP Blaikie into one of the follow-up questions.

Hon. Charlie Watt: Maybe I'll just get my lawyer to....

The Chair: We're going to move to MP Wrzesnewskyj, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Senator Watt, for your compelling testimony. It's good to have you back on the Hill.

Hon. Charlie Watt: I recognize you.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: You touched on an issue that we're grappling with: all of these overlaying claims of sovereignty by different countries, and the indigenous claims. We also have a layer to this that makes it very hard because of the concept of how territorial claims are laid out: They're based on mapping and maps.

Our cultural understanding of maps is very different from the cultural understanding of the land in the north. It's in the report that your legal counsel produced back in 2012, wherein they talk about the ice being just an extension of the land. Most of the time, it's ice.

When you began your testimony, you talked about how you had mapped out the territories through which the Inuit ranged. It would be tremendously helpful if we could get a copy of that map, at least what is within Canadian territory, so that we have a full comprehension of that range and how it overlies our claims to sovereignty based on UN rules and international agreements, because there's also this whole question. I don't know, but they might not correspond, because in it, it also talks of the Inuit claim going without interruption to the seaward-facing coast of the Arctic, meaning Ellesmere Island, and so on. How far out does it range? If we could be provided with that, it would be tremendously helpful.

Perhaps to the analyst, could we have clear maps of all seven countries and their claims and what the international waters are, and from the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the various Inuit groups from those various countries and their claims, if they have them? Although I'm sure the legal framework is very different in some of those countries, that would at least help us start to try to sort things out.

I make that request, if you'd like to address it. I'm thankful that you mentioned the whole incident about Inuit being moved from northern Quebec in 1955 to Ellesmere Island. It actually strengthens Canada's case for sovereignty—

Hon. Charlie Watt: Exactly.

● (1705)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: —but it is a painful historical episode.

Hon. Charlie Watt: Yes.

In regard to your question, this mapping that I talked about had nothing to do with making a claim. All it does is show how the Inuit of the Arctic travel and interact, even though they're so far apart from each other, and so on. Examples are Greenland and Canada or Alaska and Canada.

It's a trail. It's a trail of the people, the movement of the people. They've been fluctuating back and forth between the high north, which is the top of the world, down to the bottom of where the last Inuit people are—I shouldn't say last.

Labrador is also a part of it, so we did the mapping there too, and in Quebec. This is big. The travel routes start from there, from the bottom on up. Whether it was wintertime or summertime, you travelled either by dog teams or by boat. This is what is on the trail. That's what we have mapped out, but this has nothing to do with an attempt to make a claim.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: If I could come back to this, the understanding of the environment is so different there, and of land and ownership. It's a whole different understanding, as we heard in the first hour. Here's where I have a problem. We have land claims being made by one of the countries—Russia. According to the Lomonosov Ridge, which is under the sea—

Hon. Charlie Watt: Along the continental shelf—

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: It extends all the way to Ellesmere Island. It's not just a claim to Arctic international waters; it's claiming Canadian territory based on rules that don't reflect the reality of the north. Those were rules set by seafaring nations that weren't icebound and that were trying to extend jurisdiction out from ports that were accessible.

Those rules are being applied in an area where we don't acknowledge land claims based on sea surface and ice. The UN, however, appears to be perhaps on the cusp of saying that there might be some claim based on ridges under the sea.

The Chair: MP Wrzesnewskyj—

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Could we have your quick thoughts on that? I'm struggling with some of it.

The Chair: I hear you. What I'll say now—and I'll use this to refer to MP Blaikie's question too—is that there's clearly lots of information being sought by the committee. We can have the clerk follow up, but regarding MP Blaikie's question and the last question, if you'd like to submit anything to the committee, we'll certainly take that in. We clearly didn't have time to dig into some of these issues more deeply. I do want to give time for members to ask their questions.

We're going to move to three minutes for MP Baylis, and then three minutes for MP Aboultaif as well.

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Charlie, you said you speak a different language. Which language do you speak, your own language?

Hon. Charlie Watt: I speak the same language as the people in the Arctic, Inuktitut.

Mr. Frank Baylis: I would like to understand something within the context of your world, not our world. You come here, you speak in English, you're wearing a tie and you're talking about something that we care a lot about, which is sovereignty. We care because we want control, we want resources, and so on.

If you were back home and speaking in your own language, how would you be speaking about this whole issue? Would it even be a discussion point, as nomadic people? What would be going on?

Hon. Charlie Watt: Do you want me to be honest with you?

Mr. Frank Baylis: Yes.

Hon. Charlie Watt: Then I'll say it in one way: You want it again.

Mr. Frank Baylis: You want it again...?

● (1710)

Hon. Charlie Watt: It's as in, "You want to take it". What we're saying is that the southern people, people from other parts of the world, want to extract the resources from under our feet. It cannot happen just like that. That's what we're trying to say. If there are transactions between the two, we have to be part of it.

Mr. Frank Baylis: If we weren't coming up and bothering you—

Hon. Charlie Watt: I wouldn't be bothering you.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Frank Baylis: Among yourselves you wouldn't be arguing about who owns the land, would you?

Hon. Charlie Watt: We know we own the land. We were there before anybody else. How does the ownership begin? Think about that.

Mr. Frank Baylis: You wouldn't be having a discussion like "This piece is mine, you can't come here." Would that be part of this?

Hon. Charlie Watt: If the Arctic is being treated as a country that has symbolic state recognition, we would be operating very differently with the Canadian government and with the other countries, but the fact is that we're not recognized as a state. That's why we can't participate, even though they're doing whatever they can to try to extract certain things under our feet.

This is not a little issue. This affects people's lives, their social life and mental life, their economy, their education, and the well-being of Inuit. Those are important to us. It might not be important to the people from the south, because they don't live with us on a daily basis. I can understand that, but what the government will have to recognize is not the question of rights, rights as existing in the Arctic, because the rights are already there and already recognized. They have a constitutional label on it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ask a very short question, please, MP Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you.

We know one of the biggest problems out there in the Arctic area is our very small population compared to other claimants of the area from other nations. That is a fundamental problem. How do you get the sovereignty you're looking for, extract the resources we need, and have an overall plan for the next 100 years? How do you go about that with a very small population?

Hon. Charlie Watt: The fact that we have a very small population is one of the reasons we're counting on our Canadian government to make sure they stick with us and be partners. We're not looking at it any other way. If you kick us out of the country, then maybe we have to think of something else, but today we're part of you. We're no different from you. We pay taxes just like you. We might have a certain set of rights as an ethnic component, but that's a reality.

The Chair: Thank you very much to you both. Again, you've given us lots to think about and probably a good amount to follow up on as well.

Hon. Charlie Watt: We have lots more.

The Chair: Senator and Ms. Campbell, thank you for being here.

We're going to take 30 seconds. We'll suspend, and then we're going in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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